

BUILDING CAPACITY

CREATING CURRICULUM PATHWAYS

The nation has made an unprecedented investment in community colleges to simultaneously increase college completion and stimulate economic recovery. One of the most substantial investments was the Trade Adjustment Act Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) program of the United States Department of Labor (U.S. DOL). Beginning October 2011, the TAACCCT program was intended to support the efforts of community colleges to develop training programs and build their capacity to innovate (United States Department of Labor, 2011).

The Transformative Change Initiative (TCI) recognized the potential importance of TAACCCT to enhance community colleges' ability to better serve all students. Through professional development, research, evaluation and networking, TCI invited these colleges to share what they were learning and ways in which they were changing their policies and practices with the goal of improving student outcomes. TCI collaborated with 24 consortia to publish *Strategies for Transformative Change* briefs that describe specific strategies that each consortium implemented. Looking across these briefs, we identified a number of key topical areas under which the grant-funded innovations (strategies) could be organized, including partnerships, career pathways, and intrusive student support, and we examined how the consortia engaged in capacity building to accomplish their goals.

How did TCI think of capacity building? Our thinking went beyond the question of short-term changes and a focus on compliance to long-term change that has the potential to improve performance while sustaining access. We looked for evidence that changes were accompanied by data and other indications that colleges were focusing on activities that would allow them to create structures and processes to engage in deep and collective capacity building necessary to sustain change (Sharratt & Fullan, 2013; Kezar, 2014).

This brief is one in a series that focuses on capacity building of TAACCCT funded consortia. In this brief, we describe ways in which we saw three consortia creating curriculum pathways to prepare individuals for living-wage employment and provide skilled workers for industry. Each of the three consortia focused on a different program area – nursing, energy, and information technology – and the colleges used various methods to create pathways to improve retention and accelerate time to completion. Here, we will summarize the factors that were critical to the capacity-building and identify the similarities in their approaches.

Transformative Change Overview

The Transformative Change Initiative (TCI) is dedicated to sustaining and scaling change that closes equity gaps and improves student outcomes in the community college education context.

PACE

The Path to Accelerated Completion and Employment (PACE) initiative was undertaken by a consortium of all 22 community and technical colleges in Arkansas, led by NorthWest Arkansas Community College. The Consortium received a Round One TAACCCT grant to improve retention, increase achievement rates, and reduce time to completion in both manufacturing and healthcare programs. The Consortium redesigned the Associate's Degree in Nursing (ADN) curriculum to 60 hours that could be completed in five semesters.

The factors most critical to the consortium building capacity for making curriculum change were

- capitalizing on statewide momentum to change;
- involving key stakeholders, including faculty, students, curriculum committees, industry partners, accreditation and state board members; and
- bringing in expert consultant to provide training early in grant period.

Arizona Sun Corridor – Get Into Energy Consortium (ASC-GIEC)

The Arizona consortium included five community colleges and several industry partners working together to broaden the talent pipeline for the energy industry with a Round Two TAACCCT grant. Estrella Mountain Community College led the consortium in the adaptation of an existing model to develop the Get into Energy (GIE) Competency Model, with industry partners providing input on the essential skills to include in the curriculum. The eight-tier stackable credential model includes two common foundational courses in mining and energy programs of study in which students develop essential skills (academic and workplace) and identify occupational-specific pathways. Students have opportunities to earn multiple credentials that coincide with several exit and entry points on the way to the AAS degree in multiple fields, including Power Plant Technology, Electrical Utility Technology, Radiation Protection Technology, and Information Technology.



The factors most critical to the consortium building capacity to develop the Competency Model were

- committed employer engagement throughout the process (development of model, interacting with students, and modifying hiring practices),
- adaptation of an existing model to fit the needs of Arizona industries, and
- development and use of hiring projections to advise students and align.

Sinclair Community College – Broward College – Austin Community College

This three-state consortium received a Round Two TAACCCT grant to adapt the Western Governors University Competency-based Education (CBE) model for students enrolled in information technology programs. The Consortium saw the adoption of CBE as a disruptive innovation that would require institution-wide change and developed a model that incorporated four interconnected components: curriculum design, workforce relationships, program delivery, and student support.

The factors most critical to the consortium building capacity for making curriculum change were

- shared commitment among the leadership at the consortium and colleges,
- attention to multiple factors, including institutional organization, policies, college systems, faculty governance, workforce needs, and Department of Education requirements,
- engagement with industry appropriate to the region of each college.

What We Learned about Capacity Building

These three consortia capitalized on the momentum and commitment to change demonstrated by leadership within their regions to undertake the curricular adaptations. Seeing the need to create more and stronger pathways for students in each of their fields, the Consortium leaders worked to build the buy-in of key people within their colleges. Each consortium understood the critical need for

employer partners in the process, and the consortia put together a team of experts that included faculty, external subject matter experts, instructional designers, and industry representatives. The teams worked together to identify the essential competencies for each program, review the curricula, and undertake the change. Within each of the three consortia, the curriculum revisions were undertaken with a commitment to providing students with flexible entry and exit points. To accomplish the program changes, the colleges gave necessary attention to institutional processes that were connected to the delivery of instruction, and they included representatives from administrative and academic units in their work. The consortia combined the early commitment to change with a collaborative process to develop current, competency-based training. As a result, students received industry-recognized credentials that prepared them for entry into the workforce and further postsecondary education.

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